

PRECHAMPIONSHIP 2026-27 MANUAL

NCAA General Administrative Guidelines

Contents

Section 1 • Introduction 2
Section 1•1 Definitions 2
Section 2 • Championship Core Statement 2
Section 3 • Conduct 3
Section 3•1 Certification of Eligibility/Availability 3
Section 3•2 Drug Testing 3
Section 3•3 Honesty and Sportsmanship 3
Section 3•4 Misconduct/Failure to Adhere to Policies 4
Section 3•5 Sports Wagering Policy 4
Section 3•6 Student-Athlete Experience Survey 4
Section 4 • Elite Scholar-Athlete™ Award 5
Section 5 • Fan Travel 5
Section 6 • Health and Safety 5
Section 7 • Logo Policy 5
Section 8 • Research 6
Section 9 • Travel Party 6
Section 10 • Religious Conflicts 6
Section 11 • Team Replacement Policy 6

THE NATIONAL COLLEGIATE ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION
P.O. Box 6222
Indianapolis, Indiana 46206-6222
317-917-6222
ncaa.org
September 2026

NCAA, NCAA logo, National Collegiate Athletic Association and Elite Scholar-Athlete are registered marks of the Association and use in any manner is prohibited unless prior approval is obtained from the Association.

Section 1 • Introduction

During the 2026-27 academic year, the Association will sponsor 94 national championships — 43 for men, 49 for women and two for both men and women. Of the men's championships, four are National Collegiate Championships, 13 are Division I championships, 12 are Division II championships and 14 are Division III championships. Of the women's championships, 10 are National Collegiate Championships, 12 are Division I championships, 13 are Division II championships and 14 are Division III championships. The combined men's and women's championships are National Collegiate Championships.

The Prechampionship Manual will serve as a resource for institutions to prepare for the championship. This manual is divided into three sections: General Administrative Guidelines, Sport-Specific Information and Appendixes.

Sections one through nine apply to policies applicable to all 94 championships, while the remaining sections are sport specific.

Section 1•1 Definitions

Prechampionship Manual. Resource for institutions to prepare for the championship.

Administrative Meeting. Prechampionship meeting for coaches and/or administrators.

Appendixes. Any supplemental documents to be provided and distributed through the various resources.

Championship Manager. The NCAA staff member(s) responsible for the operational oversight of the championship.

Games Committee. The committee assigned to supervise the conduct of each championship session at a specific site. For finals sites, the games committee is typically the NCAA national committee.

NCAA National Committee. The sport committee with direct oversight responsibilities for the championship.

Nonpredetermined Sites. Those sites that are selected to host at the time of the participant/team selections announcement.

Playing Rules. The rules under which the competition will be conducted.

Predetermined Sites. Those sites that are selected to host before the participant/team selections announcement.

Preliminary Rounds. The rounds of the championship before the final or championship round.

Regional Alignment. The geographic location of institutions or regional advisory committees.

Schedule of Events. Official event schedule – includes all required activities (e.g., practices, banquets).

Selection Criteria. Policies and procedures in place to guide the team selection process.

Site Selection Criteria. Policies and procedures in place to guide the site selection process.

Squad Size. In any championship in which a squad limit has been established by the governing sport committee or by the bylaws, the number of eligible student-athletes in competitive uniform eligible to participate at the start of competition.

Tournament Physician. The physician designated by the host institution/conference to serve as the chief medical advisor for the championship event(s) to be hosted at the host venue.

Section 2 • Championship Core Statement

The championships and alliances staff strives to administer competition in a fair, safe, equitable and sportsmanlike manner so that the experience of the student-athlete is paramount.

This is attained by:

Ensuring student-athletes' optimal experience.

Executing championship events reflecting appropriate quality and values to/for stakeholders — student-athletes, coaches, administrators, member institutions, sport committees, fans, broadcast partners and corporate champions/partners.

Coordinating all aspects of the championship in an efficient, effective manner through common operating policies and practices, using internal and external resources.

Integrating championships with broadcast and corporate relationships in a manner that maintains the integrity of the championship.

Assuring effective management of the business aspects of the operation.

Enhancing the assets of the NCAA and their value by collaborating with internal and external expertise to achieve heightened exposure (e.g., community programs, fan events, banquets, anniversaries).

Section 3 • Conduct

Section 3•1 Certification of Eligibility/Availability

[Reference: Certification of Eligibility/Availability in Bylaws 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 20.2.4, 31.2.1.7.1, 31.2.1.7.1.2 and 31.2.2 in the NCAA Division I Manual, Bylaws 7.3.1.5 and 18.2.1 in the NCAA Division II Manual and Division II Championships Committee Policy and Bylaws 31.2.1.5, 31.2.1.5.2, and 31.2.2 in the NCAA Division III Manual.]

Only student-athletes eligible under Bylaws 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16 may compete in NCAA championships. Member institutions are required to certify the eligibility of their student-athletes before the beginning of each academic year and to withhold ineligible student-athletes from all intercollegiate competition.

Member institutions are reminded to notify the NCAA national office before the selection date for each championship of any student-athlete who may have participated in regular-season competition but subsequently is determined to be ineligible or unavailable for NCAA championship competition.

DISCOVERY OF INELIGIBILITY OF A STUDENT-ATHLETE AFTER SELECTION

If an institution fails to report an ineligible student-athlete and the omission is not discovered until after the institution is selected to participate in the championship, necessitating the institution's withdrawal from the championship, that withdrawal shall be considered as one of the years of ineligibility, provided another institution participates in the championship in place of the disqualified institution. If the discovery of the ineligible student-athlete occurs so near the beginning of the championship that the governing sport committee does not have a reasonable period of time to replace the disqualified institution in the bracket, that fact shall be taken into consideration in determining the number of years the disqualified institution shall be ineligible to participate.

Section 3•2 Drug Testing

As part of preparation and planning to participate in championship events, member institutions are reminded and encouraged to review all applicable policy and legislative requirements pertaining to banned substances, drug testing and related eligibility requirements with their student-athletes. Student-athletes who compete in NCAA championships may be subjected to drug tests in accordance with legislation and may be determined to be ineligible as a result thereof. Only student-athletes who have consented in writing to such testing are initially eligible for these championships; and thereafter, student-athletes who are tested shall remain eligible only if they test negative.

Section 3•3 Honesty and Sportsmanship

Individuals employed by (or associated with) a member institution to administer, conduct or coach intercollegiate athletics and all participating student-athletes shall act with honesty and sportsmanship at all times so that intercollegiate athletics as a whole, their institutions and they, as individuals, shall represent the honor and dignity of fair play and the generally recognized high standards associated with wholesome competitive sports.

Section 3•4 Misconduct/Failure to Adhere to Policies

MISCONDUCT

Misconduct in an NCAA championship is any act of dishonesty, unsportsmanlike conduct, unprofessional behavior or breach of law, occurring from the time the championship field is announced through the end of the championship, that discredits the event or intercollegiate athletics. Each games committee shall hold an administrative meeting with the representatives of participating institutions to review and explain the policies related to misconduct.

FAILURE TO ADHERE TO POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

A governing sport committee may assess a financial penalty against an institution for failure of any of its representatives to adhere to the policies and procedures governing the administration of the competition. This includes, but is not limited to, failure to comply with the procedures and deadlines for submitting scores, score sheets, schedules, rosters and entry/march-in forms for qualification and other materials necessary for the efficient administration of the competition. **Click here** to see the full misconduct/failure to adhere to policies and procedures online.

Section 3•5 Sports Wagering Policy

Sports wagering includes placing, accepting or soliciting a wager (on a staff member's or student-athlete's own behalf or on the behalf of others) of any type with any individual or organization on any intercollegiate, amateur or professional team or contest. Examples of sports wagering include, but are not limited to, the use of a bookmaker or parlay card; internet sports wagering; mobile betting; auctions in which bids are placed on teams, individuals or contests; and pools or fantasy leagues in which an entry fee is required and there is an opportunity to win a prize.

The current NCAA legislation against sports wagering prohibits NCAA student-athletes, member institutions' athletics staff and non-athletics staff with athletics responsibilities, and conference office staff from participating in sports wagering activities or providing information to individuals involved in or associated with any type of sports wagering activities concerning intercollegiate, amateur or professional athletics practice or competition in a sport in which the NCAA conducts championship competition, in bowl subdivision football and in emerging sports for women.

A wager is any agreement in which an individual or entity agrees to give up an item of value (e.g., cash, shirt, dinner) in exchange for the possibility of gaining another item of value.

STUDENT-ATHLETES

A student-athlete found in violation of the prohibition against knowingly participating in any sports wagering activities or providing information to individuals involved in or associated with any type of sports wagering activity that involves intercollegiate, amateur or professional athletics competition shall be ineligible for further intercollegiate competition, subject to appeal to the Committee on Student-Athlete Reinstatement for restoration of eligibility.

POSTSEASON

In championships in which a bracket format is used, student-athletes, coaches and administrators may not participate in bracket competitions where there is both a required entry fee and an opportunity to win a prize. Student-athletes and administrators may participate under current NCAA rules in bracket contests where there is no entry fee but a possibility of winning a prize. Some NCAA member schools, however, have chosen to ban student-athletes from participating in these types of bracket contests.

HOSTING OPPORTUNITIES

It is permissible for NCAA championships to be conducted at locations in states that permit sports wagering.

Section 3•6 Student-Athlete Experience Survey

During the NCAA championships, the student-athlete experience is paramount. NCAA staff and hosts dedicate themselves to planning the best experiences for all involved. As part of our commitment to getting better, following the championship, participants will receive a survey to provide feedback on their experience and input on how

championships can be improved for future NCAA student-athletes. Institutional administrators and coaches will receive an email containing a link to the survey and will be asked to forward the survey to student-athletes. Additionally, this survey will be accessible via QR code found on the back of NCAA-issued championship credentials.

We also understand that sometimes certain circumstances or conditions occurring during the events may require real-time consideration. When this is the case, student-athletes may reach out to their site representative or NCAA national office staff on-site.

Section 4 • Elite Scholar-Athlete™ Award

The Elite Scholar-Athlete award was created to recognize the true essence of student-athletes by honoring individuals who have reached the pinnacle of competition at the national championship level in their sport, while also achieving the highest academic standard among their peers. The award is presented in every sport, every division, and goes to the student-athlete who has the highest cumulative grade-point average of all student-athletes competing at the finals site. One student-athlete per championship will receive the award, and the announcement of the winner will be made at the finals site.

Institutions that wish to nominate a student-athlete must do so through an online nomination process. For more information or to access the online form and submit a nomination, **click here**.

Section 5 • Fan Travel

Through support from Marriott International as the Official Hotel Partner of the NCAA, NCAA championships are pleased to provide easy and affordable accommodations for family and fans to follow their favorite student-athlete(s) and team(s) as they participate in NCAA championships competition. Travel arrangements completed through Marriott and NCAA Travel help support NCAA student-athletes. Please direct your fans to **ncaa.com/travel** to search and book online hotel reservations.

Section 6 • Health and Safety

As part of preparation and planning to host and/or participate in championship events, member institutions are reminded and encouraged to review all applicable health and safety policy and legislative requirements and guidance including, among others, those relating to concussion management, catastrophic injury prevention, inclement weather and independent medical care. These requirements and related information can be found in applicable division manuals, sports playing rules and the materials located on the **Health, Safety & Performance website**. In addition, a summary of some of the key health and safety considerations related to traveling to championship events can be found in the **NCAA's Guidance for Medical Care and Coverage for Student-Athletes at Away Events**.

Section 7 • Logo Policy

[Reference: Bylaw 22.4.1 in the NCAA Division I Manual, 17.1.10 Bylaw in the NCAA Division II Manual and 12.5.3 Bylaw in the NCAA Division III Manual.]

A student-athlete may use athletics equipment or wear athletics apparel that bears the trademark or logo of an athletics equipment or apparel manufacturer or distributor in athletics competition and pregame and postgame activities (e.g., celebrations on the court, pregame or postgame press conferences), provided the following criteria are met.

(a) Athletics equipment (e.g., shoes, helmets, baseball bats and gloves, batting or golf gloves, hockey and lacrosse sticks, goggles and skis) shall bear only the manufacturer's normal label or trademark, as it is used on all such items for sale to the general public; and

(b) The student-athlete's institution's official uniform (including numbered racing bibs and warm-ups) and all other items of apparel (e.g., socks, head bands, T-shirts, wrist bands, visors or hats, swim caps and towels) shall bear only a single manufacturer's or distributor's normal label or trademark (regardless of the visibility of the label or trademark), not to exceed four square inches in area (rectangle, square, parallelogram) including any additional material (e.g., patch) surrounding the normal trademark or logo. The student-athlete's institution's official uniform and all other items of apparel shall not bear a design element similar to the manufacturer's trademark/logo that is in addition to another trademark/logo that is contrary to the size restriction.

Section 8 • Research

In order to avoid inappropriate and unnecessary participant distraction and disruption of championship events, it is expected any data collection or other research efforts conducted at or during championship events will be coordinated through the national office, with notice and a description of any research proposal to be submitted to the NCAA research staff at least six weeks before the championships event begins.

Section 9 • Travel Party

Please refer to the NCAA travel policies for all information regarding transportation and per diem expenses. NCAA Travel policies are updated annually and can be found online **here**. Please reference Appendix A of the travel policies for reimbursable travel party numbers. The travel policies supersede all other documents.

Section 10 • Religious Conflicts

[Reference: Bylaws 31.1.4.1 and 31.1.4.2 in the NCAA Division I Manual.]

Institutional Policy. If a participating institution has a written policy against competition on a particular day for religious reasons, it shall inform the NCAA national office on or before Sept. 1 of each academic year in order for it or one of its student-athletes to be excused from competing on that day. The championship schedule shall be adjusted to accommodate that institution. *(Adopted: 4/22/98, Revised: 8/11/98, 10/28/99, 5/2/13)*

Individual Championships. In individual championships, an athlete must compete according to the institution's policy regarding Sunday competition (if the institution has no policy against Sunday competition, the student-athlete shall compete on Sunday if required by the schedule).

Section 11 • Team Replacement Policy

Division I developed a team replacement policy considering the possibility of unforeseen circumstances impacting championship fields. The policy will be implemented in accordance with the terms set forth in the policy document available **here** when, despite best efforts, a team within the championship field is impeded or hindered from participating in the championship for reasons beyond its control.

Division I Football

Contents

Section 1 • General Administration 8
Section 1•1 NCAA Staff Contact Information 8
Section 1•2 National Committee 8
Section 1•3 Regional Advisory Committees 9
Section 1•4 Important Dates 9
Section 1•5 Equipment 10
Section 1•6 Rules 11
Section 1•7 Uniforms 12
Section 2 • Determination of Championship Participation 13
Section 2•1 Championship Format 13
Section 2•2 Selection Information 14
Section 2•3 Selection Criteria 16
Section 2•4 Site Selection 17
Section 2•5 Preliminary-Round Hosting — Proposed Budget 18
Appendix A • Bracket 20
Appendix B • Sport Sponsorship 21

Section 1 • General Administration

Section 1•1 NCAA Staff Contact Information

Ty Halpin
Director, Championships and Alliances
P.O. Box 6222 / Indianapolis, Indiana 46206-6222
317-917-6136 / **thalpin@ncaa.org**

David Lentz (Media Coordination)
Assistant Director, Championships and Alliances
P.O. Box 6222 / Indianapolis, Indiana 46206-6222
317-917-6139 / **dlentz@ncaa.org**

Antonio Cannavaro
Coordinator, Championships and Alliances
P.O. Box 6222 / Indianapolis, Indiana 46206-6222
317-917-6956 / **acannavaro@ncaa.org**

Corey Bray
Associate Director, Championships and Alliances
P.O. Box 6222 / Indianapolis, Indiana 46206-6222
317-917-6076 / **cbray@ncaa.org**

Kristen Jacob Smith (Broadcasting)
Associate Director, Championships and Alliances
P.O. Box 6222 / Indianapolis, Indiana 46206-6222
317-917-6584 / **kjsmith@ncaa.org**

Sam Gillas
Postgraduate Intern, Championships and Alliances
P.O. Box 6222 / Indianapolis, Indiana 46206-6222
317-917-6382 / **sgillas@ncaa.org**

Section 1•2 National Committee

Current members of the committee can be found at the following link: web1.ncaa.org/committees/#/reports/roster?committeeCode=1AAFB

For additional information about the NCAA Division I Football Championship, contact:

Ty Halpin, Championships and Alliances
317-917-3136 / **thalpin@ncaa.org**

Corey Bray, Championships and Alliances
317-917-6076 / **cbray@ncaa.org**

Kit Hughes, chair
Director of Athletics
College of the Holy Cross
508-793-2582/ **chughes@holycross.edu**

Section 1•3 Regional Advisory Committees

NAME	INSTITUTION	CONFERENCE
CENTRAL REGION		
Brady Barke, vice chair	*Southeast Mo. St.*	*OVC*
Jason Coomer	Lindenwood	OVC
Bill Chaves, chair	**North Dakota**	**MVFC**
Nathan Christensen	Indiana St.	MVFC
Phil Esten, vice chair	*St. Thomas (MN)*	*Pioneer*
Laurel Hosmer	Valparaiso	Pioneer
EAST REGION		
Yariv Amir	Colgate	Patriot
Mark Benson, vice chair	*UAlbany*	*CAA*
Elliott Charles, vice chair	*Long Island*	*NEC*
Rick Christensen	Duquesne	NEC
Mike Harrity	Dartmouth	Ivy League
Kit Hughes, vice chair	*Holy Cross*	*Patriot*
John Mack, chair	**Princeton**	**Ivy League**
Steve Eigenbrot	Towson	CAA
SOUTH REGION		
Romantic Banks	**Southern**	SWAC
Kyle Pifer	Western Caro.	SoCon
Zack Lassiter	Abilene Christian	UAC
Josh Looney, chair	**North Ala.**	**UAC**
Eddie Robinson, Jr.	Alabama St.	SWAC
Oliver Pough	South Carolina St.	MEAC
Melody Webb	Norfolk St.	MEAC
Casey Fox, vice chair	*Tennessee Tech*	*SoCon*
WEST REGION		
Leon Costello, chair	**Montana St.**	**Big Sky**
Jim Curry, vice chair	*East Texas A&M*	*Southland*
Michael McBroom	Stephen F. Austin	Southland
Pauline Thiros	Idaho St.	Big Sky

Section 1•4 Important Dates

Monday, Oct. 5	Championship information and forms available on **ncaa.org** for prospective preliminary-round host institutions.
Thursday, Nov. 5	Prospective preliminary-round host institutions bid submission deadline.
Sunday, Nov. 22	Final selections and announcement of bracket during a selection show at noon Eastern time on ESPNU.

CHAMPIONSHIP DATES (2026-27)

The dates and sites of the NCAA Division I Football Championship are determined by the Division I Football Championship Committee, subject to the approval of the Division I Football Oversight Committee.

First Round	Saturday, Nov. 28, at on-campus sites (8)
Second Round	Saturday, Dec. 5 at on-campus sites (8)
Quarterfinal Round	Friday, Dec. 11 and Saturday, Dec. 12, at on-campus sites (4)
Semifinal Round	Saturday, Dec. 19, at on-campus sites (2)
Championship Game	Monday, Jan. 11, 2027, at Dudley Field at FirstBank Stadium, Nashville, Tennessee

DATE FORMULA

First Round	Last Saturday in November
Second Round	First Saturday in December
Quarterfinals	Second Friday/Saturday in December
Semifinals	Third Friday/Saturday in December
Championship Game	Between Dec. 29 and the Second Monday in January

FUTURE DATES

2027-28 Championship (*tentative*)

Championship Selections	Sunday, Nov. 21
First Round	Saturday, Nov. 27, at on-campus sites (8)
Second Round	Saturday, Dec. 4 at on-campus sites (8)
Quarterfinals	Friday, Dec. 10 and Saturday, Dec. 11, at on-campus sites (4)
Semifinals	Friday, Dec. 17 and Saturday, Dec. 18, at on-campus sites (2)
Championship Game	Jan. 10, 2028

Section 1•5 Equipment

GAME BALLS

The Wilson F1002 (GST - Red), F1003 (GST - Tan), F10053 (Omega), F10060 (NFL Cut) and F10094 (GRT) footballs are the official balls for the championship and will be used in all rounds of competition. Institutions will be allowed to choose the model of Wilson football they wish to use while on offense throughout the championship.

After selections, each participating team will receive 12 Wilson footballs which may be used throughout the duration of the preliminary rounds. It is expected that the 12 Wilson balls, provided by Wilson, will last through the duration of the preliminary rounds. **Please note, however, that institutions may use their own regular season footballs as along as they are one of the approved Wilson ball models**. In the rare instance where extra footballs are needed, please contact Ty Halpin (**thalpin@ncaa.org**) and Corey Bray (**cbray@ncaa.org**) at the NCAA national office. The two teams advancing to the Football Championship Subdivision Championship Game will receive a separate shipment of 12 footballs to be used for the NCAA Division I Football Championship Game.

INSTANT REPLAY

Instant replay will be used at each game of all rounds of the championship. Instant replay equipment will be provided by DVSport to each site using instant replay by DVSport. Each stadium will be responsible for providing all audio/video cabling and ring-down phone connections from the broadcast truck positions to the replay booth.

Personnel

1. Replay Official and Communicator. The conference selected to officiate the preliminary-round game will recommend a replay official and a replay communicator for the game. The recommendations must be approved by the NCAA, in consultation with the national coordinator of football officials. Those selected should not have any conflict of interest (perceived or actual) to any team or conference participating in the game they are assigned to work. The NCAA will coordinate air travel, if necessary, and help secure the use of a rental car for the replay official and communicator. Rental car expenses will be direct billed to the NCAA (when using Enterprise or National).

   The NCAA will be responsible for reimbursing the replay official and replay coordinator for the game fee ($710 for the replay official; $500 for the communicator), transportation between home and the game site in their personal automobile (at the current rate per mile, if the official did not fly) and per diem ($45 per day).

   NCAA staff will reimburse these positions via RefQuest+ and these individuals will receive information on setting up an account in RefQuest+ once they are selected to work a game.

   The host institution will be responsible for securing, and will need to be direct billed for, lodging for these individuals for up to two nights. The host institution should reflect these instant replay lodging expenses in the proposed budget as a budgeted expense.

2. DVSport Staff. Representatives from DVSport will be on-site to manage the technical aspects of the instant replay equipment and work with the replay official in the replay booth during the game as the communicator and technician. The host institution will be responsible for securing, and will need to be direct billed for, lodging for these individuals for up to three nights. The NCAA will coordinate and cover the cost of air travel, if necessary, and help secure the use of a rental car for DVSport personnel.

3. Sideline Assistant. The host institution will secure two local individuals to serve as sideline assistants. The sideline assistants assist the replay official in communicating with the on-field officials for the review and discussion of plays, when necessary. The sideline assistants should each be paid a $100 fee for their service, which should be paid by the host institution. The host institution should reflect these expenses on its proposed budget and financial report as a budgeted expense.

Space and Power Requirements

Dedicated private space in the press box or suite level to accommodate not fewer than four people is required. This space should:

1. Provide an unobstructed view of the playing field.
2. Provide adequate counter space (at least 10 feet long and two feet deep) in the front of the box.
3. Provide at least two dedicated power sources with a minimum of four power outlets.
4. Provide enough power to accommodate a power consumption of 15 amps.
5. Be separated from any other activity (e.g., media, fans).

A representative from DVSport will be present at the mandatory administrative meeting to answer any questions.

Section 1•6 Rules

Per NCAA Bylaws 18.6 and 31.1.6, member institutions shall conduct all intercollegiate competition in accordance with the playing rules of the Association in all sports for which the NCAA develops playing rules.

The current NCAA Football Rules Book will be followed and may be found on the **NCAA website**.

OFFICIALS

A sport committee or games committee may not require membership in any specific officials' association as a prerequisite for selection to officiate in an NCAA championship competition. Officials shall be selected and assigned by the sport committee or games committee (with the assistance of the coordinator of football officials), which shall ensure that officials adhere to the Association's policies relating to gambling activities and drug and alcohol use. Furthermore, officials must conduct themselves in a manner befitting intercollegiate athletics. Failure to do so may result in termination of the officiating assignment.

The seven game officials and one alternate for all games (or eight officials for conferences that use that system during the regular season) will be selected by the NCAA Division I Football Championship Committee/College Football Officiating, LLC (CFO) from Division I Football Championship Subdivision conferences. The committee will use the following criteria when assigning officials: (1) Officials must be neutral, and games between two institutions from the same conference must be officiated by an officiating crew from another conference; (2) proximity of officials to the competition site; and (3) frequency of assignments.

Section 1•7 Uniforms

The host institution will be the home team and will wear dark jerseys in the first-round, second-round, quarterfinal and semifinal contests. The visiting team will wear white jerseys. At the championship game, the higher-seeded team will be the home team and will wear dark jerseys. The visiting team will wear white jerseys. If neither team is seeded, the home team will be determined by the NCAA. In all cases, the visiting team will be introduced first and will take the field first.

The logo restriction on student-athlete apparel set forth in Bylaw 22.4 shall apply during NCAA championships to all personnel (e.g., coaches, athletic trainers, managers) who are in the team area for practices and games, or who participate in news conferences. The logo restriction on student-athletes' apparel set forth in Bylaw 22.4 shall apply to commercial logos on uniforms worn by band members, cheerleaders, dance team members and the institution's mascot during NCAA championship events.

LOGOS

Refer to General Administrative Guidelines, Section 7.

Section 2 • Determination of Championship Participation

Section 2•1 Championship Format

The NCAA Division I Football Championship provides for a maximum field of 24 teams. Eleven member conferences were granted automatic qualification for the championship. The remaining 13 teams will be selected at large by the NCAA Division I Football Championship Committee.

The top 16 teams in the 24-team bracket for the championship will be seeded. Team pairings will be determined according to geographical proximity. Teams from the same conference will not be paired for first-round games (except for teams from the same conference that did not play against each other during the regular season; such teams may play each other in the first round).

Eight first-round games will be conducted on the campus of one of the competing institutions, and the winners will advance to the second round. The second round features eight games (including the eight teams that received a first-round bye) on the campus of one of the competing teams. Second-round winners meet in the quarterfinals on the campus of one of the competing institutions. Quarterfinal winners will advance to the semifinals on the campus of one of the participating institutions. The winners of the semifinal games will play in the NCAA Division I Football Championship Game in Nashville, Tennessee on Monday, Jan. 11, 2027.

START TIMES

Starting times shall be determined by the NCAA's broadcast partner in consultation with the NCAA and the host institution.

During the first three rounds of the championship, the NCAA will solicit the preferred starting times of host institutions. However, it is preferred that games do not start earlier than 2 p.m. local time.

Tentative ESPN Broadcast Schedule (listed in Eastern Standard Time)

ROUND	DATE	TIME	BROADCAST NETWORK
First-Round Games (8)	Nov. 28	TBD/Various	ESPN+
Second-Round Games (8)	Dec. 5	TBD/Various	ESPN+
Quarterfinal-Round Game	Dec. 11	9 p.m.	ESPN
Quarterfinal-Round Game	Dec. 12	Noon	ESPN
Quarterfinal-Round Game	Dec. 12	8 p.m.	ESPN
Quarterfinal-Round Game	Dec. 12	TBD	ESPN+
Semifinal-Round Games (2)	Dec. 19	4/8 p.m.	ABC/ESPN2
Championship Game	Jan. 11	7:30 p.m.	ESPN

One quarterfinal game will occur Friday, Dec. 11, and three quarterfinal games will occur Saturday, Dec. 12. Both semifinals will be played on Saturday, Dec. 19 with one at 4 p.m. and one at 8 p.m. Eastern time.

The quarterfinal schedule will be determined by the NCAA Division I Football Championship Committee the Saturday night of the preceding round. Prospective hosts should note these date possibilities in their facility evaluation forms and when developing their proposed budgets.

NOTE: Friday games are not permitted in the first or second rounds.

TICKETS

Each competing institution will have access to an allotment of 500 tickets for each round of the championship. The host institution may use its discretion in the location for the visiting team tickets. Host institutions may place the visiting team fans in the same location(s) as they do for all regular-season games.

The host institution or sponsoring agency will retain 250 of the 500 tickets, and the competing institutions will be advised that they are available, if needed. Additional tickets may be purchased, but seat locations will not be guaranteed.

The visiting institution is required to purchase a minimum of 200 tickets from the host institution at the standard price in that location for any preliminary-round playoff game.

Each institution shall return all money and unsold tickets and inform the host institution or sponsoring agency of the number it will require from the 250 tickets being retained, not later than 6 p.m. three days before the game (i.e., Tuesday for a Friday game and Wednesday for a Saturday game). If the tickets are not returned to the host institution or sponsoring agency by this time, the institution shall be responsible for all unreturned tickets at face value. Once the competing institutions release the tickets being retained, the host institution or sponsoring agency will use them for public sale.

The NCAA Division I Football Championship is a premium event and should be priced accordingly. Therefore, tickets should be priced not less than the single game regular season ticket price or $25 minimum, whichever price is higher. The following ticket price parameters are applicable for all rounds.

Please note, promotional pricing may fall outside of these parameters with prior approval from the NCAA. Proposed ticket prices must be submitted to the NCAA on the host's proposed budget form. Prices may not be changed unless approved in advance by the NCAA. Tickets cannot go on sale without approval from the NCAA.

Should the visiting team bring its band to a preliminary-round game, band members should be provided with admission at no charge. The seating for the visiting band should be in addition to the visiting team ticket block. Visiting teams are required to notify the host institution tournament manager no later than 5 p.m. (host institution local time) on the Monday of game week whether they plan to bring a band and, if so, how many seats are needed for the band.

Teams cannot provide tickets to a partner for the sole purpose of reselling tickets on ticket marketplaces regardless of if it is above or below face value.

TRAVEL PARTY

The size of the travel party is 130 people for the first-round, second-round, quarterfinal and semifinal contests, including a maximum of 64 student-athletes in uniform.

For the championship game, the travel party will be 145 people, including a maximum of 70 student-athletes in uniform.

Section 2•2 Selection Information

ALLOCATION OF BERTHS

The championship provides for a field of 24 teams. Eleven conference champions qualify automatically. The balance of the field is selected at large by the Division I Football Championship Committee.

AUTOMATIC QUALIFICATION

Conference champions must be determined not later than Saturday, Nov. 21. Conferences must submit their notification of automatic qualifier online via the AQ Forms App in NCAA My Apps.

The following 11 conferences were granted automatic-qualification privileges for the championship:

Big Sky Conference	Patriot League
Coastal Athletic Association	Pioneer Football League
The Ivy League	Southern Conference
Missouri Valley Football Conference	Southland Conference
Northeast Conference	United Athletic Conference
Ohio Valley Football Conference	

NOTE: The Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference (MEAC) and Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC) did not apply for automatic qualification.

The NCAA Division I Football Championship Committee will annually make the determination of which eligible conferences will receive automatic qualification. The following criteria are used when determining which conferences shall receive annual automatic qualification for the NCAA Division I Football Championship:

1. Nonconference records.
2. Strength of nonconference opponents.
3. Recent postseason history.
4. Competition against Football Bowl Subdivision opponents.

AT-LARGE SELECTION

For the NCAA Division I Football Championship, 13 at-large spots will be available in the 24-team championship field.

PARTICIPATION PROCEDURES (COUNTABLE COMPETITION)

For NCAA team-championship selection purposes per NCAA Bylaw 31.3.3, competition is countable only when the teams played are varsity intercollegiate teams of four-year, degree-granting institutions that conduct a majority of their competition in that team sport against varsity intercollegiate teams (see Bylaw 20.2.4.6) of United States four-year, degree-granting institutions. Competition against service teams, professional teams, semi-professional teams, amateur teams, two-year colleges and club teams shall be excluded.

TRAVEL INFORMATION

During the championship, institutions that are playing within 400 miles (one way) of their campus will be required to travel to that site via bus. Institutions traveling equal to or more than 400 miles (one way) to their game will be approved for air travel to that site. All air travel arrangements will be made via Short's Travel Management.

1. **Arrival Times at Playoff Sites**. Participating institutions in first-round, second-round, quarterfinal and semifinal games shall arrive not later than the established practice time the day before competition.
2. **Lodging.** The host institution or sponsoring agency shall make local reservations for the visiting team and advise them of the arrangements. These arrangements should include an appropriate amount of meeting space (see below for details) at the hotel for the visiting team. Each visiting institution is obligated to confirm their accommodations. A minimum of 60 double-double rooms should be reserved by the host institution for the visiting team for all preliminary-round games. Pullout or sofa beds are not appropriate for student-athlete lodging. It is strongly recommended that the hotel reserved for the visiting team meet the following specifications:
    a. Lodging accommodations are all located in one hotel property.
    b. A full service property, which includes on-site food and catering.
    c. Be located within 45 miles of the competition venue.
    d. Have minimum meeting space to accommodate one room for 100 for the purpose of team meals, two breakout rooms for 40 per room and a conference room for athletic training needs.
    e. Provide a late check-out for any game starting after 4 p.m. local time.

    Failure to meet any of the above recommendations may have an impact on a site being selected to host during the preliminary rounds. If any of the above recommended requirements cannot be met, the host institution must make the NCAA championship managers (Ty Halpin [**thalpin@ncaa.org**] and Corey Bray [**cbray@ncaa.org**]) aware of the shortfall when submitting other bid materials.

    A visiting team hotel lodging/accommodations questionnaire will be required to be submitted with the hosting bid materials. If a visiting team prefers to stay at a hotel other than the one to which it was assigned, it may be released from all or a portion of its room obligation only if it obtains a written release of the reserved rooms from the hotel general manager before 5 p.m. local time on the Tuesday prior to the game. The hotel is under no obligation to provide this release. The visiting institution must file a copy of the written release with the NCAA site representative and the host institution. If a visiting institution fails to obtain this written release with the assigned hotel for the use of the original reserved rooms, full charges for these rooms will be the visiting institution's financial responsibility. Unless approved by the NCAA in advance, an institution is precluded from relocating to a hotel where the game or instant replay officials are assigned.

The host institution is responsible for making hotel arrangements and providing payment for the lodging of the eight officials, the instant replay official, communicator, DVSport personnel and the NCAA site representative assigned to its site, for a total of 13 rooms. These lodging expenses should be budgeted for and included in the proposed budget.

3. **Transportation**. Please refer to NCAA travel policies for all information regarding transportation and per diem expenses. Travel policies can be found on the **NCAA website**.
4. **Manifest Deadlines**. For all traveling teams, all passenger and equipment needs should be loaded into the Shorts Travel Manifest as soon as possible before selections. For teams that are traveling by air to their first-round game, all flying preferences must be submitted to Shorts by 4 p.m. Eastern time, Sunday, Nov. 22.
5. Teams that fly to the site of competition and kickoff at or after 3 p.m. local time, shall plan for a next-day air charter departure. Teams that drive to the competition site can determine if they want to depart after the game or the next day. For all traveling teams the NCAA per diem policy covers a full day of per diem on the day of competition and a half day the day after competition, if the team travels home the day after competition. The next-day departure for fly teams that kickoff after 3 p.m. local is intended to allow for a smoother travel experience and reduce many issues related to late departures (e.g., TSA screening, weather, availability of aircraft, response time to mechanical issues).
6. **Expense Reimbursement**. Transportation expenses and a $160 per diem will be provided for each member of the travel party. The size of the travel party is 130 people for preliminary-round contests, including a maximum of 64 student-athletes. For the FCS championship game, the travel party will be 145 people, including a maximum of 70 student-athletes.

Section 2•3 Selection Criteria

At-large teams shall be selected by the NCAA Division I Football Championship Committee, assisted by four regional advisory committees that serve in an advisory capacity only.

The following principles shall apply when selecting at-large teams:

1. The committee shall select the best teams available on a national at-large basis to complete the bracket. Per NCAA Bylaw 31, the basic criteria used in the selection of at-large participants are: (1) won-lost record, (2) strength of schedule, and (3) eligibility and availability of student-athletes for the NCAA championship.
2. There is no limit to the number of teams the committee may select from one conference.
3. The won-lost record of a team will be scrutinized to determine a team's strength of schedule. However, fewer than six Division I wins may place a team in jeopardy of not being selected.
4. The committee will give more consideration to teams that have played all Division I opponents and/or a greater number of Division I games.
5. If a committee member's institution is under consideration, that committee member will not be allowed in the room during discussions involving his/her team and may not vote for his/her team during the voting process. Similarly, a committee member from a conference office may not be present during discussions, nor vote for any team from his/her conference. A committee member that must be recused is permitted to share factual information with the committee before being excused (e.g., player availability).
6. The committee will use two predictive methods (Massey and ESPN) and two results-based metrics (KPI and ESPN) as a secondary tool for evaluating teams.

BRACKET PAIRINGS

All pairings will be made by the NCAA Division I Football Championship Committee. The following principles are applied when pairing teams:

1. The teams awarded the top eight seeds receive a bye in the first round and are placed in the appropriate positions in the bracket (Nos. 1, 8, 4 and 5 in the upper half; and Nos. 2, 7, 3 and 6 in the lower half).
2. Teams awarded the 9-16 seeds are placed in the appropriate positions in the bracket (Nos. 16, 9, 12 and 13 in the upper half; Nos. 14, 11, 10 and 15 the lower half).

3. The remaining eight teams will play first round games and will be paired according to geographic proximity and then placed into the bracket against the 9-16 seeds previously placed into the bracket.
4. The NCAA mileage threshold for mandatory team travel via ground is 400 miles (one way).
5. Teams from the same conference will not be paired for first-round games (except for teams from the same conference that did not play against each other during the regular season; such teams may play each other in the first round).
6. In the instance a seed change is warranted, a vote of 70% by the remaining committee members will be required to make a change.

   (1) Teams seeded 9-16 may be adjusted no more than one position.

   (2) Teams seeded 1-8 cannot be adjusted unless it is to satisfy the criteria below:

   - If a conference has four or more teams in the championship, the Division I Football Championship Committee may allow a seed adjustment of one line to avoid a conference having all its teams on the same side of the bracket.

7. Once the first-round pairings are determined, there will be no adjustments to the bracket (e.g., a seeded team may play a conference opponent that advanced out of the first round).

Section 2•4 Site Selection

Regarding first-round, second-round, quarterfinal and semifinal sites, in addition to the criteria listed in Bylaw 31.1.3.2.1, the NCAA Division I Football Championship Committee shall consider the following additional criteria when selecting playoff sites:

1. The committee will consider all aspects of the host facility, including previous crowd-control measures and crowd behavior of the prospective host institution (regardless of seeding).
2. Prospective host institutions must submit the following minimum financial guarantees, which shall be 75% of the estimated net receipts as submitted on the proposed budget:

   - First round – $50,000
   - Second round – $60,000
   - Quarterfinals – $70,000
   - Semifinals – $80,000

3. If the minimum financial guarantees are met and the host location/facility can provide a quality experience for the visiting team, the committee will award the playoff sites to the higher-seeded teams.
4. When determining host institutions for playoff games when both teams are unseeded, the following criteria shall apply: (1) quality of facility, (2) revenue potential plus estimated net receipts, (3) attendance history and potential, (4) team's performance (i.e., conference place finish, head-to-head results and number of Division I opponents), and (5) student-athlete well-being (e.g., travel and missed class time).
5. A conference champion would host a first-round game against a conference opponent (if applicable). This policy would be contingent upon the conference champion meeting the facility requirements to host and submitting an acceptable bid by the established deadline.
6. If a second-round, quarterfinal or semifinal playoff site is not available because the institutions involved did not submit a proposed budget, the committee will contact the institutions and offer the opportunity to submit a bid at the current round's minimum financial guarantee level. If seeded teams are not involved, the committee will determine the host institution by applying the championship site-selection criteria in Bylaw 31.1.3.2.1.

Section 2•5 Preliminary-Round Hosting — Proposed Budget

Any institution interested in hosting preliminary-round competition of the NCAA Division I Football Championship must submit a proposed budget, respond to sport-specific questions, ensure that the institution's key contacts and facility information is up to date, submit proof of insurance, and upload the video board questionnaire (if applicable), instant replay questionnaire and photos of the designated instant replay space via the Championships Bid and Host Profile portal (**championships.ncaa.org**). To submit a bid, first search for the desired championship under Championships Available for Bid and select Add Bid.

Please note that all member institutions are allowed to regularly and easily access their profiles by visiting **championships.ncaa.org**. For profile issues, user access or to reset a password, please email **championshipbid@ncaa.org** or contact Kerstin Hunter (**khunter@ncaa.org**) at the NCAA national office.

CHAMPIONSHIPS BID AND HOST PROFILE PORTAL

The Championships Bid and Host Profile portal can be accessed at **championships.ncaa.org**. The deadline to submit all bid materials for this championship is Thursday, Nov. 5, 2026.

As a reminder, prospective host budgets should include the lodging expenses of the committee/NCAA site representative, eight game officials, the instant replay official, communicator, DVsport personnel, state and city taxes/fees, if applicable, and any ticket fees. The Committee/NCAA site representative's per diem, mileage and luggage fees will be paid by the NCAA. Game officials will also be reimbursed by the NCAA using the RefQuest+ system for their game fees, per diem, mileage and luggage fees.

FACILITY PROFILE

Institutions interested in hosting preliminary-round competition of the NCAA Division I Football Championship must add (or ensure the accuracy of) facility information for the applicable competition venue. This information is located at **championships.ncaa.org**. Any supporting information (e.g., facility diagram, pictures) may be uploaded and attached to that facility's profile. This information will be made available to the NCAA Division I Football Championship Committee to aid in their deliberations of prospective host sites.

KEY CONTACTS

Each institution should list and then maintain its key contacts associated with each sport and the institution. Individuals can be added via the Championships Bid and Host Profile portal at **championships.ncaa.org**.

SAFETY AND SECURITY PLAN

Based on a review of current and future championships competition venues, discussions with safety and security experts, and its own expertise and knowledge, the NCAA established a Safety and Security Advisory Group (SSAG) to develop a compilation of Best Practices for NCAA Championships. We urge each competition venue to take these best practices into account when developing its safety and security program. As part of your bid, please submit a safety and security plan for your venue, which would be inclusive of the NCAA Championships Safety and Security Team contact information form, located in Appendix A of the best practices document.

The best practices for venue safety and security, along with the safety and security contact form, are located at **championships.ncaa.org**.

FINAL FINANCIAL REPORT

A final financial report from each championship site must be submitted via the Championships Bid and Host Profile portal under the budget tab not later than 60 days after the event.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions regarding the bid process, please contact Ty Halpin (317-917-6136 / **thalpin@ncaa.org**) or Corey Bray (317-917-6076 / **cbray@ncaa.org**). If you experience technical difficulties with the Championships Bid and Host Profile portal, please contact **championshipbid@ncaa.org**.

Appendixes

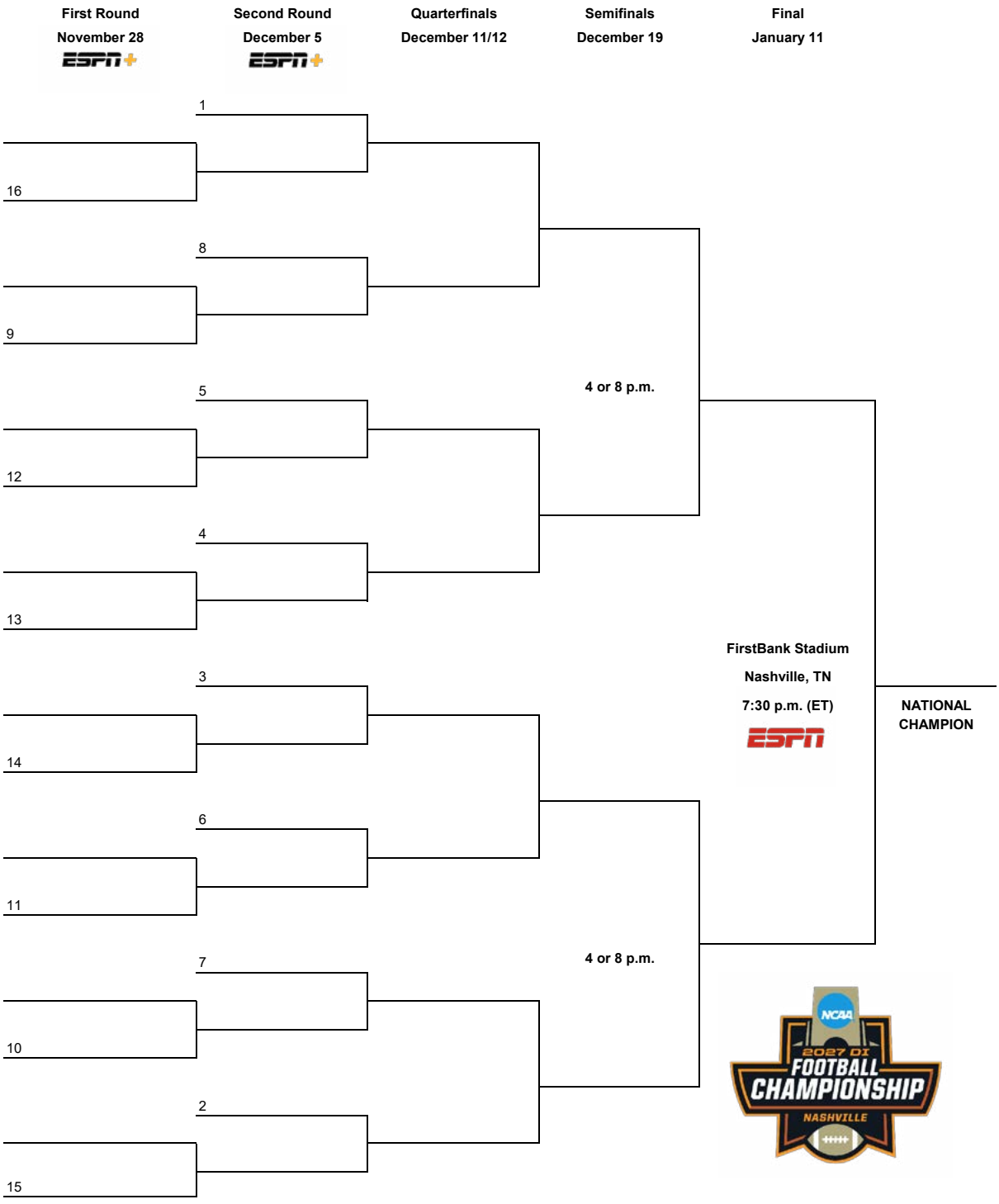
Contents

Appendix A • Bracket **20**

Appendix B • Sport Sponsorship **21**

Appendix A • Bracket

2026 NCAA Division I Football Championship



* Host Institution
All times are Eastern time. Information subject to change.
© 2026 National Collegiate Athletic Association. No commercial use without the NCAA's written permission.

Appendix B • Sport Sponsorship

CENTRAL REGION

Missouri Valley Football Conference (9)

Illinois State University
Indiana State University
Murray State University
University of North Dakota
University of Northern Iowa
University of South Dakota
South Dakota State University
Southern Illinois University at Carbondale
Youngstown State University

AQ Conference

Ohio Valley Football Conference (8)

Charleston Southern
Eastern Illinois University
Gardner-Webb University
Lindenwood University
Southeast Missouri State University
University of Tennessee at Martin
Tennessee State University
Western Illinois University

AQ Conference

Pioneer Football League (11)

Butler University
Davidson College
University of Dayton
Drake University
Marist College
Morehead State University
Presbyterian College
University of San Diego
University of St. Thomas (Minnesota)
Stetson University
Valparaiso University

AQ Conference

EAST REGION

Coastal Athletic Association (13)

University at Albany
Bryant University
Campbell University
Elon University
Hampton University
University of Maine
Monmouth University
University of New Hampshire
North Carolina A&T State University
University of Rhode Island
Sacred Heart University
Stony Brook University
Towson University

AQ Conference

The Ivy League (8)

Brown University
Columbia University
Cornell University
Dartmouth College
Harvard University
University of Pennsylvania
Princeton University
Yale University

AQ Conference

Northeast Conference (6/*8)

Central Connecticut State University
Duquesne University
Long Island University
*Mercyhurst (reclassifying – eligible in 2028)
*New Haven (reclassifying – eligible in 2028)
Robert Morris University
Stonehill College
Wagner College

AQ Conference

Patriot League (10)

Bucknell University
Colgate University
Fordham University
Georgetown University
College of the Holy Cross
Lafayette College
Lehigh University
University of Richmond
Villanova University
College of William & Mary

AQ Conference

Independent (2)

Chicago State University
Merrimack College

SOUTH REGION

United Athletic Conference (6/*8)

Abilene Christian University
Austin Peay State University
University of Central Arkansas
Eastern Kentucky University
University of North Alabama
Tarleton State University
*West Florida (reclassifying – eligible in 2029)
*West Georgia (reclassifying – eligible in 2028)

AQ Conference

Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference (6)

Delaware State University
Howard University
Morgan State University
Norfolk State University
North Carolina Central University
South Carolina State University

Non-AQ Conference

Southern Conference (10)

The Citadel
East Tennessee State University
Furman University
Mercer University
Samford University
University of Tennessee at Chattanooga
Tennessee Technological University
Virginia Military Institute
Western Carolina University
Wofford College

AQ Conference

Southwestern Athletic Conference (12)

Alabama A&M University
Alabama State University
Alcorn State University
University of Arkansas, Pine Bluff
Bethune-Cookman University
Florida A&M University
Grambling State University
Jackson State University
Mississippi Valley State University
Prairie View A&M University
Southern University, Baton Rouge
Texas Southern University

Non-AQ Conference

WEST REGION

Big Sky Conference (13)

California Polytechnic State University
University of California, Davis
Eastern Washington University
University of Idaho
Idaho State University
University of Montana
Montana State University-Bozeman
Northern Arizona University
University of Northern Colorado
Portland State University
University of Southern Utah
Utah Tech University
Weber State University

AQ Conference

Southland Conference (10)

Houston Christian University
University of the Incarnate Word
Lamar University
McNeese State University
Nicholls State University
Northwestern State University
Stephen F. Austin State University
Southeastern Louisiana University
East Texas A&M University
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

AQ Conference